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SUBJECT: QADHAFI DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION CONFIRMS RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONER MUHAMMAD BOUSIDRA

REF: 08 TRIPOLI 993

¶1. (C) Saleh Abdulsalam Saleh, Chairman of the Qadhafi Development Foundation's (QDF) Human Rights Committee, confirmed to us that longtime political prisoner Dr. Muhammad Bousidra was released on June 14 and had returned to his family home in Benghazi. Opposition website Libya al-Youm reported on June 8 that Bousidra had been released; however, Saleh said the organization had misinterpreted his conversation with them and that Bousidra had not yet been released at that time. The premature announcement by Libya al-Youm had then prompted Libyan security officials - who had been unaware that he was to be set free - to balk, delaying his release until the QDF could secure the necessary permissions.

¶2. (C) According to opposition websites, Bousidra was a religious cleric and political activist who was arrested in January 1989 and held for over ten years without being charged. He is described as having been the longest-serving, living political prisoner in Libyan custody. Bousidra was hastily tried in late 1999/early 2000 by a specially-convened "People's Court" on charges that he had sought to undermine the al-Fatah revolution and was sentenced to life imprisonment. He was re-tried in 2005 and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment on the original charges, which dated to actions in 1988. He had already served 17 years in prison at the time of the re-trial and it was argued he should be released; however, Saleh said the Internal Security Organization (ISO) had refused to let him go.

¶3. (C) Saleh said the QDF, which is chaired by Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi, recently brokered Bousidra's release as part of a broader program of dialogue with former religious extremists, which has led to the release of some former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (reftel and previous). He said Bousidra had been provided with financial compensation, allowed to return to his home and would be assisted in trying to find a job and "regain his life". Saleh was evasive on the question of whether Bousidra remained under house arrest. In a formulation we've heard before in connection with the case of Fathi el-Jahmi, he conceded that Libyan security officers were posted at Bousidra's house, ostensibly to protect him from irate citizens and conservative regime elements who might otherwise seek to do him harm in retaliation for his alleged activities to topple al-Qadhafi's regime.

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